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INTERNATIONAL LABOR LEGISLATION AND HOW IT CAN BE ENFORCED IN THE UNITED STATES

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IN discussing new international relations, in discussing a new condition of relations which is to govern the conduct of men and women, beginning, as we hope to, upon a new basis, there is no principle that should deserve better, higher and deeper consideration than that of creating standards which are to be recognized alike by all the great nations of the earth with reference to men, women and children in industry. The greatest asset which any nation has, and, therefore, the greatest asset which all of the nations of the world have, is not its mines, or its gold, or its silver, or its manufactures—not those tangible things that men and women prize so highly—but the human beings that make up the nations, the men and the women and the children. It is fitting, therefore, in considering any treaty of peace, or any league or covenant which is to govern the nations of the earth, to consider the future of these assets, and what can be done to raise their value if you wish to consider the question only commercially.

Year by year, in the different nations of the earth and the different states of this nation, we have considered and endeavored to perfect means and measures by which men and women who labor shall labor under conditions and under standards which will improve their lives,—which will not only make them happier, but make them better able to render greater service to the nation at large and in particular to those who employ them. We have endeavored in all the states to create standards by legislation, so that men and women will have a chance to be better and happier men and women.

Internationally we may consider five or six great cardinal principles which will make for better conditions under which men and women and children may live and labor, and which in the main will be the subject of international cooperation

or international agreement. First, perhaps, and foremost, should be considered the future citizens of all countries and what can be done by international cooperation to conserve these future citizens of the state, the children. We all know how in the dark ages, not so many years ago, the labor of children was exploited,—how children began their daily labors often at three and four and five years of age, when they could scarcely go to work but were compelled to, and how year by year legislation has added a year here and a year there, until the legal working age in all civilized countries has now been raised to at least fourteen years. We all know, too, how legislation which curbed the right to make children work at a very early age was attacked in all the countries, and particularly in England and here, upon the ground that it interfered with a man's liberty, that it was a man's or a woman's or a child's liberty to work at whatever age he pleased, and no concern of the nation or the state. As the foundation, therefore, of all international standards, some agreement may well be arrived at among all the nations, that no child—at least under the age of fourteen years,—should be permitted to work. If we adopt such a standard, if we begin with that basis, by an agreement among the nations of the earth, enforced by co-operation, enforced by example, we will be building for the future and for the making of greater nations than we ever have had in the past. With a limitation like that, each child will have a better training, will be better equipped for life and will be able to enter upon their industrial and civic life with a foundation of knowledge, which many children at this time do not possess.

There should also be a provision that children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen should be limited to certain kinds of work, should only be allowed to work a certain number of hours, and that there should go hand in hand with work between those ages some system of training, either in the factory or in the workshop, or connected with it, so that the child, if it must labor, will be enabled with the help of the state and the nation to finish out its training, and so that all children, as far as the state can assist them to do so may enter upon life with a proper training.

The next of these cardinal principles, as I may call them, which may be a subject of international agreement, is that of

some limitation of hours of labor. There again we meet with the claim that men have a right to sell their labor for as long and as many hours as they please. It is all they have to sell, and they claim to be allowed to sell it at such price and on such terms and conditions as they please. But there, again, we must not forget that the state and the nation have rights that transcend those of the individual, because the individual who works or is permitted or forced to work hours beyond what men should be permitted to work, becomes a liability to the nation. Instead of becoming a help, he becomes a drag, and, therefore, the nation has a real interest and a right to limit undue and harmful labor and to say by international agreement whether it be forty-eight hours per week or whether it be fifty-four. Whatever decision may be the result of conference and agreement, some standard should be fixed, so that all the men of the earth—provided local conditions do not interfere—should have one common standard, one universal standard of hours of labor, and thus each man in each nation may have before him a common goal and an equal opportunity.

The next, and perhaps going hand and hand with this last principle, is that of seeing that each man and woman receives, not a minimum wage—I never liked the term “minimum wage”—but receives a living wage, because it is the right of men and women to receive a recompense in return for labor sufficient for them to support life upon. We used to believe that there was an economic principle, that labor received its due, if it was entitled to its due, but we know now that sometime people are unable to protect themselves, and while even today in many of our American states we hesitate to enact legislation which provides for a living wage for men, in many other states we have seen the justice and the wisdom of providing for a living wage for women, so that they should have the protection which legislation would give them, so that they might be guaranteed, not a minimum wage, but a wage sufficient to support life. If international agreements can accomplish anything, if we are going to build from now on for a better world because of the lessons which the war has taught,—lessons which have been learned and are being learned, one international standard is vitally essential—not from the standpoint of the workers, but from the standpoint of the general public that a living wage should be paid to each worker.

There should also be made some provision by which each worker, if the enterprise and local conditions permit—and it has been demonstrated that almost every business can easily be regulated to permit this—that each worker should receive at least one day's rest in seven. That was thought at one time to be a measure which encouraged idleness. People never looked beyond the mere statement of the fact that every man or woman wanted a day of rest, whether it was for the observance of religious rites, or merely because a rest was desired for reasons of health. But as we study more and more the problem of conserving human life and of preventing the deterioration and break-down of men and women, we see more clearly the necessity, especially in the great manufacturing industries—of giving to every man and woman one day, one full period of twenty-four hours in the seven days of the week when all labor shall cease, and when man or woman may be privileged to devote himself or herself to such pleasures or enjoyments or relaxation as he or she sees fit.

Another great cardinal principle, and more and more one that we see the necessity of each day as we recognize that men and women are in many ways alike, is that men and women shall receive equal pay for the same work. If we ask a woman to do the work which a man does or has done, and she does it as well as a man, there is no reason under the sun why she should not receive the same pay. We could make no better ending of this brief statement of cardinal principles underlying international labor standards than to say that men and women, if they are of the same ability, if they can perform the same tasks and perform them equally well, should be equal as far as compensation is concerned.

I think this briefly outlines what may be considered the cardinal underlying principles of international agreement respecting men and women and children who are employed. I may call them, not cardinal principles, but humane principles, because they are founded upon a basis of humanity. Every one of them has as its foundation some human rights, reasonably short hours of work, a regular period of rest, equality of pay, the prevention of the premature labor of children. These are principles which can be easily embodied in a single page of any covenant of peace or league of nations. They will

appeal, not only to the workers of all the nations of the world, but they will appeal to all the people who stand behind the nations and of whom nations are made.

We read to-day much about the unrest of labor. In the learned paper and the exhaustive paper which the former Attorney-General of the United States has just read, he tells of how the English labor representatives said, "We will no longer return to conditions as they existed before the war, we will not go back and take up the thread of life as it was woven and spun for us before this great war begun. We must have better conditions". It is true that all over the world, wherever men and women gather, and wherever men and women think about their conditions, that same cry goes forth, "We cannot go back", "We cannot begin where we left off before the war began". We must live under different conditions of life, and the only way those conditions can be made different and better and be enforced is by international agreement, because if all the people are treated alike in these conditions of labor throughout the world, no man can complain that one nation profits by lower conditions than another. No state need have greater competition with the employers of another state, because the hours of labor are different, because children may be employed in one state for longer hours or at different ages than they can be employed in another; and if, by international agreement and by cooperation among the nations, principles like these are established, we will begin, as I have said before, this new life upon a real, solid and lasting foundation.

We will do away, too, with much of the labor unrest, because labor unrest very often has its roots in the early and premature employment of children, in long hours of labor, in bad working conditions. A child who goes to work, or who is forced to work with an improper training, with nothing before it on its horizon, but more and more endless hours of toil, without hope for the future, easily falls a prey to unrest and dissatisfaction. At one blow you do away with much of the cause of unrest, with much of the ground of dissatisfaction, if all children and young persons are not permitted to begin labor until they have received what the state should give them, what every child is entitled to have from the state, a proper foundation, a proper training upon which to build future man-

hood and womanhood. We are living to-day in momentous times, in times when things like these of which I have spoken are not unreasonable to expect. We are turning a page of history, a page upon which has been written wonderful deeds, it is true, but they have been the deeds of force, they have been the achievements of might. We are glad to turn that page today and turn to a more wonderful and still fairer page, a page on which is being written, not the triumph of force, not the victories of might, but upon which is being written the achievements and the victories of peace and the triumph of right. Upon the page in letters that are everlasting, letters never to be erased, shall be written justice to all men, and that those things of which I speak, the conditions under which men and women and children labor, shall be safeguarded and become the concern of the organized society of which we all are a part. Only in this way may we hope for a better world in the future peopled with better men and better women and better children working under conditions which will no longer be such that men may fear,—no longer will men even speak of unrest or dissatisfaction,—but which will inaugurate that era of peace which we hope this great war, with all its sacrifices has forever won.

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